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city of del mar memorandum

To: Commission, Committee and
Board Members

Date: June 27, 1980

From: City Manager

Subject: Decision Making and Parliamentary Process

The Design Review Board asked that I prepare for them a short presentation on decision making and the parliamentary process with the hope that it might assist in reducing the length of meetings. We held a brief work session on June 18th, and shortly thereafter I discussed the same subject with the Planning Commission on June 23rd. As a result of this interest, I have taken my notes and reduced them to writing in hopes that it may be of interest to other members of advisory committees in the conduct of their business.

These are not all original thoughts, but have been picked up from several sources over the past several years-- most recently from Gregg Wright, the consultant-trainer who worked with our management group.

SUGGESTIONS TO FACILITATE GROUP DECISIONS:

1. First, learn to count to one more than Majority, or to the vote necessary to take action. If there are five members in the group, you need three votes to pass a motion. If there are seven members, you need four votes to pass a motion. Once discussion on the motion reveals a majority in favor or opposed to the motion, further discussion may unnecessarily prolong the meeting. Don't be afraid to lose occasionally.
2. Don't always strive for unanimous decisions. It is desirable to strive to reach decisions in which all group members can at least partially agree. Conflict and divergent opinions are healthy and are needed in order to arrive at good decisions, and it should be recognized where there are divergent opinions there will not always be unanimous action.
3. Avoid arguing for your own individual "judgements." Approach the task on the basis of logic and reason. Listen carefully to the opinions of others and try to keep an open mind. Play on each others' strengths and not attacking the others' weaknesses.
4. Avoid changing your mind only to reach agreement and avoid conflict. Support only solutions to the problem with which you are able to agree, or at least partially agree. Remember, as I stated above, conflict is healthy.

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5. Avoid conflict-reducing techniques such as averaging in order to reach a decision. An example might be: An applicant applies for a building 27' in height; the staff recommends 25'; the Board splits 3-3-1, so you settle on 26'. The result is that the applicant is unhappy, the staff may or may not be unhappy, and the people who supported 26' are the only persons who are happy with this decision.
6. View differences of opinion as opportunities to learn from others rather than as a hinderance to decision making.


PARLIAMENTARY PROCESS:

The purpose of Roberts' Rules of Order was originally to protect the minority and not necessarily to facilitate the decision-making nor to speed meetings. Roberts is not really appropriate for small groups, but some of the principles are valid and can be used.

The Chairperson is responsible for controlling the meeting, but the membership must cooperate. I think most of us function best in a loosely controlled meeting situation, but in order to avoid unnecessary delays there are a number of things that each member must do:

1. Don't discuss a matter until you have a motion to discuss. In the case of a public hearing process, receive testimony, ask all the questions of staff and persons appearing before the Board that are necessary in order to provide you with adequate information, but don't enter into general discussion until you have a specific point to discuss, e.g. a motion.
2. Don't be redundant. If another Board member has covered your point, you might say, "Hear! Hear!", or show other such agreement. Don't feel obligated to speak for the record.
3. Don't interrupt a speaker. Listen carefully. Seek the areas where you can agree and reduce the discussion to areas of real difference.
4. Clearly understand why you are on the Board. Not why the City Council appointed you, but your own personal "agenda - goal - reason" for volunteering your time. Once you understand, attempt to communicate this to your fellow board members and the staff. They will then be in a better position to understand your actions as a board member.
5. Understand the rules of the game. For example, "Football" is a game played on grass with 11 players on each team, in which goals are scored. But it is important to know whether you are to play with a pointed ball, or a round ball.

Be sure you know the applicable City Codes and know the rules of procedure used by your commission, committee, or board. Likewise, you should know what rules can be bent, broken, or ignored, and which must be legally adhered to.



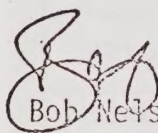
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City Staff is here to help you. They should be providing you information necessary to make the decisions that are before you, in a form that is readily digestible and useful to you. If you have any suggestions, talk it over with your staff person or give me a call. The better we work together the better product we will turn out in the long run.

I have attached for information a copy of a chart entitled "Parliamentary Procedure In Action". It presents a summary of Roberts' Rules of Order as it applies to motions that may be presented to the Floor. You may find it useful in understanding the parliamentary process.


Bob Nelson
City Manager

Attachment

cc: Department Heads
City Attorney
City Council

RAN:gs

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE IN ACTION

MOTION	MAY APPLY TO THESE MOTIONS	MAY INTERRUPT A MEMBER ON THE FLOOR	MOVER MUST BE RECOGNIZED	REQUIRES A SECOND	DEBATABLE	VOTE NEEDED
FIX TIME OF NEXT MEETING	NONE	NO	YES	YES	Not when privileged	Majority
TO ADJOURN (Recess)	NONE	NO	YES	YES	Not when privileged	Majority
QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE	NONE	Yes, if necessary	NO	NO	No, but a resulting motion is	Decided by Chair
CALL FOR ORDERS OF THE DAY	Any special or general order	Yes, to call for a special order	NO	NO	NO	None, it takes 2/3 vote to postpone special order
RISE TO POINT OF ORDER	Any motion or act	YES	NO	NO	NO	None, unless appealed, then Majority
APPEAL	Any decision by the Chair	YES	NO	YES	USUALLY NO	Majority
SUSPEND THE RULES	Any motion where needed	NO	YES	YES	NO	Usually 2/3
WITHDRAW (or Renew) A MOTION	Any motion	NO	YES	NO	NO	Majority
OBJECTION TO CONSIDERATION	Main question, and questions of privilege	YES	NO	NO	NO	2/3 in negative
LAY ON THE TABLE	Main question, appeals, questions of privilege, reconsideration	NO	YES AND	YES	NO	Majority
TAKE FROM TABLE	Only to motion that was "tabled"	NO	YES	YES	NO	Majority
CLOSE OR LIMIT DEBATE	Any debatable motion	NO	YES	YES	NO	2/3 Majority
POSTPONE TO CERTAIN DAY	Main motion, questions of privilege, reconsider	NO	YES	YES	YES	Majority
REFER	Main motion, questions of privilege	NO	YES	YES	YES	Majority
AMEND	Main motion, limit debate, refer, postpone definitely, fix time of next meeting	NO	YES	YES	YES	Majority
POSTPONE INDEFINITELY	Main motion, question of privilege	NO	YES	YES	YES	Majority
MAIN QUESTION (or Motion)	No other motion	NO	YES	YES	YES	Majority
RECONSIDER	Any motion except adjourn, suspend rules, lay on table	YES for entry	NO	YES	YES	Majority
REScind (or Repeal)	Main motions, appeals, questions of privilege	NO	YES	YES	YES	Majority

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